

City of Chicago: DFSS Accessibility Improvement Proposal

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Introduction

In the City of Chicago, the Department of Family & Support Services (DFSS) plays a critical role in connecting Chicago residents with shelter access and homelessness prevention-related support in their most critical hours. To ensure equitable access for all residents, DFSS can strengthen its accessibility infrastructure through a simple, low-cost improvement: the creation of a publicly available, online Reasonable Accommodation Request Form.

This proposal outlines a practical, easy-to-implement enhancement that would improve transparency, reduce administrative burden, and support disabled residents in navigating DFSS programs.

1. Proposal: DFSS Online Reasonable Accommodation Request Form

DFSS should create and maintain a simple, accessible online form that allows residents to request disability-related accommodations when interacting with DFSS programs, providers, or services.

1.1 Core Features

The form should:

- **Allow residents (or providers acting on their behalf) to request disability-related accommodations** in writing.
- **Provide space to describe accommodation needs** in plain language.
- **Allow optional upload of supporting documentation**, such as medical notes or letters from service providers.
- **Be accessible to screen readers** and compatible with assistive technology.
- **Be easy to complete on a phone or computer**, recognizing that many residents rely on mobile devices.
- **Be publicly searchable** on the DFSS website so residents can locate it without barriers.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this form is to provide a clear, straightforward, and accessible way for disabled residents to request accommodations and engage in the Interactive Process without requiring phone calls, in-person visits, or repeated disclosures.

1.3 Administrative Benefits

Implementing this form would:

- Reduce staff time spent fielding repeated accommodation requests.
- Create a consistent, centralized intake point for disability-related needs.
- Improve documentation and tracking of accommodation requests.
- Increase transparency and trust between DFSS and residents.

- Support compliance with federal and state disability laws through a simple, low-cost mechanism.

1.4 Cost and Feasibility

This improvement is:

- **Low-cost** (a basic web form with file upload capability).
- **Low-maintenance** (periodic review and routing to appropriate staff).
- **High-impact** (significantly improves accessibility for disabled residents).
- **Consistent with best practices** used by other municipal agencies nationwide.

2. Implementation Recommendations

To ensure the form is effective and accessible, DFSS should:

- Place the form in a **clearly labeled, publicly accessible location** on the DFSS website.
- Provide a **confirmation email** to residents after submission.
- Route submissions to a **designated accessibility coordinator or team**.
- Provide **plain-language instructions** explaining the Interactive Process.
- Offer the form in **multiple languages** consistent with City language-access policies.
- Maintain a **publicly posted response timeline**, such as “DFSS will review and respond within 5 business days.”

3. Expected Outcomes

Implementing this proposal would:

- Improve accessibility for disabled residents.
- Reduce administrative burden on DFSS staff.
- Increase transparency and consistency in accommodation handling.
- Strengthen trust between DFSS and the communities it serves.
- Demonstrate the City's commitment to equitable access and disability inclusion.

Conclusion

This proposal offers a **simple, low-cost, high-impact** improvement to DFSS accessibility infrastructure. By implementing an online Reasonable Accommodation Request Form, DFSS can modernize its processes, support disabled residents more effectively, and strengthen its commitment to equitable service delivery.

This proposal is submitted publicly to support transparency, civic engagement, and accessibility innovation within the City of Chicago.